

# *The Church In South Korea*

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Responsible Christian leaders in South Korea assess the current situation facing the Church there as more favorable than at any other time in the last fifteen years. Two major reasons exist for this optimism. The first is the lack of any serious organized resistance, religious or political, to the spread of the Christian faith. The second is a climate of renewed hope for stability and growth both in the Church and in the nation.

Korea is probably the only country in Asia where Protestant Christianity is the strongest organized religion. In few other mission fields has the growth of the Church been so spectacular. What was a handful of Protestant believers in 1885 increased to a community of 200,000 in only twenty-five years (1909) and to 675,000 in fifty years (1935-36); and by 1964 Protestantism, with an inclusive community of about 2,600,000, had become the most significant and apparently the largest religious force in the nation.

Today there is little formal opposition to its continued growth. The old religions are dying. About 80 per cent of the Korean people profess no religious faith at all. Religious membership claims vary. Some tables still show the Buddhists in the lead, but this is probably no longer true. In a recent army survey, for example, 10 per cent of the men claimed to be Protestant, 2 per cent Roman Catholic, 2 per cent Buddhist, and a surprisingly small .3 per cent Confucianist.

The churches themselves do not claim that high a proportion of the general population. A reasonable estimate would be seven or eight Christians out of every hundred Koreans. That includes both Protestants and Roman Catholics, and by Western standards may seem small, but it is an extremely high ratio for Asia. Protestants may be about 7 per cent of the population, Buddhists 5 per cent, Roman Catholics 1.1 per cent, and Confucianists perhaps 2 per cent.

The government favors no particular religious group and grants complete religious freedom. It has even



encouraged and supported an active Christian chaplaincy in the Korean armed forces, and there are 268 Protestant and 34 Roman Catholic chaplains in uniform.

Christian influence and leadership is all out of proportion to the Church's statistical share of the population. Christians are in all circles of Korean society: the composer of the Korean national anthem, the minister of defense, the head of the farmers' union, college presidents, orphanage directors, novelists, housewives, factory owners, nurses, radio stars, and shoeshine boys. There are Christians everywhere.

There are also churches everywhere. (But in North Korea not one organized Christian congregation is reported to be left.) The capital city, Seoul, has 250 Presbyterian churches alone. The largest of these is a congregation of 8,000 that by itself supports forty evangelists and two Korean foreign missionaries. Presbyterians, Methodists, the Salvation Army, and Episcopalians cooperate through the Korean National Christian Council. Until the recent divisions, the Holiness Church was also an important member of the council.

These divisions have been the most serious setback to Christian advance in Korea since the liberation of the country from the Japanese in 1945. The decade of division that followed the Korean War is mercifully drawing to a close, but it has done almost irreversible damage. It splintered the Presbyterian Church in Korea, one of the largest younger churches in the world, into four General Assemblies and a scattering of smaller dissidents. It broke the Holiness Church in two and split the Baptists. The causes of division were complex, ranging from Japanese persecution to theological differences and personal rivalries. But now, at last, the tempest seems to be quieting. The biggest and most belligerent separatist divisions, those supported by Carl Mc-

Intire's far-right attacks on evangelical conservatism, are now fighting among themselves and splitting into ever-smaller groupings.

In the sturdier churches the slow work of reconciliation has begun. Despite the divisions that remain, church growth continues, and Protestants are turning from their separation to resume together the work, begun in 1884, of evangelizing Korea.

A nationwide, interdenominational evangelistic campaign is currently under way. Its goal is to penetrate the country's present religious vacuum and to make Korea a significantly Christian nation by 1984, the hundredth anniversary of the beginning of Protestant work in that land.

Five major target areas have been selected: (1) rural Korea, where the Church's numerical growth is threatened by severe economic distress; (2) industrial Korea, where a fast-growing secularized society is losing contact with the Church; (3) the universities, where the specter of future unemployment can easily turn Korea's best-trained minds not to Christ but to the radical left; (4) the military, where the world's fourth-largest standing army is an open mission field; and (5) the underprivileged, the poor, the sick.

The Korean church has the vitality and in great measure the resources for the task.

Korean laymen and laywomen are witnessing Christians. They have always been the cutting edge of Christian growth. Korea has more Protestant theological students than any other country in Asia, Africa, or Latin America. It has a network of Christian universities and colleges that are among the best in the nation. The largest women's university in the world is a Methodist school in Korea.

Korea has the first Christian radio network in Asia (HLKY), and through another Christian station (HLKX) it reaches with the Gospel even into Communist China. It is now pioneering in Christian television. Its Christian hospitals are famous the length and breadth of the land—"islands of mercy in a sea of suffering," they have been called. Converted patients from one such hospital alone, Taegu Presbyterian Hospital, have gone back to their villages to start more than one hundred new churches.

But to reach their ambitious goal, Korea's churches will need help—they are asking for more than two hundred new missionaries in the next ten years—and they will need to work together. □

## Progress of the Faith: A Statistical Analysis

| Country  | Population           | Area             | Protestant Community   | %          | Protestant Church Membership | Places of Worship | Roman Catholic Community | %          | Protestant National Male Staff Members | Protestant National Female Staff Members | Protestant Foreign Male Staff Members | Protestant Foreign Female Staff Members |
|--|----------------------|------------------|--|------------|------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| AFGHANISTAN                                    | 13,800,000           | 250,000          | No figures available   |            |                              |                   |                          |            |  |  |                                       |   |
| BHUTAN   | 700,000              | 18,000           | No figures available   |            |                              |                   |                          |            |  |  |                                       |   |
| BURMA  | 23,664,000           | 261,789          | 1,137,084  | 4.8        | 463,974                      | 5,667             | 183,000                  | .8         | 3,852                                  | 584                                      | 52                                    | 77                                      |
| CAMBODIA, LAOS, and VIET NAM (North and South) | 39,148,000           | 306,780          | 89,247   | .23        | 44,470                       | 509               | 1,302,714                | 3.3        | 548                                    | 9  | 53                                    | 89                                      |
| CEYLON   | 10,625,000           | 25,322           | 92,533   | .87        | 46,233                       | 614               | 737,259                  | 6.9        | 654                                    | 188                                      | 46                                    | 43                                      |
| CHINA  | 686,400,000          | 3,760,339        | Figures would have little significance because of unavailability of data |            |                              |                   |                          |            |  |  |                                       |   |
| HONG KONG                                      | 3,592,000            | 391              | 123,504  | 3.4        | 90,971                       | 290               | 146,464                  | 4.0        | 806                                    | 152                                      | 175                                   | 203                                     |
| INDIA  | 449,381,000          | 1,261,597        | 8,875,336  | 2.0        | 3,083,894                    | 47,374            | 5,620,054                | 1.2        | 29,720                                 | 8,434                                    | 2,568                                 | 2,593                                   |
| INDONESIA, inc. WEST IRIAN                     | 97,765,000           | 735,865          | 6,387,600  | 6.5        | 408,216                      | 9,634             | 1,176,693                | 1.2        | 25,513                                 | 757                                      | 360                                   | 325                                     |
| JAPAN  | 96,160,000           | 142,688          | 676,719  | .7         | 594,141                      | 7,042             | 266,262                  | .29        | 6,272                                  | 535                                      | 1,733                                 | 1,367                                   |
| KOREA (North and South)                        | 38,339,000           | 85,285           | 2,687,451  | 7.0        | 382,099                      | 6,823             | 413,485 (South only)     | 1.1        | 6,231                                  | 724                                      | 158                                   | 144                                     |
| MALAYA and SINGAPORE                           | 6,515,000('58)       | 50,680           | 124,453  | 1.9        | 60,708                       | 491               | 151,565                  | 2.5        | 385                                    | 61                                       | 216                                   | 277                                     |
| NEPAL  | 9,388,000            | 54,362           | 449  | .005       | 230                          | 13                |                          |            | 42                                     | 29                                       | 25                                    | 67                                      |
| NEW GUINEA and PAPUA                           | 2,009,197            | 183,540          | 416,057  | 20.7       | 194,417                      | 3,048             | 69,603                   | 3.5        | 1,717                                  | 100                                      | 315                                   | 233                                     |
| NORTH BORNEO and SARAWAK                       | 1,245,028            | 77,638           | 54,792   | 4.3        | 21,649                       | 226               | 59,958 (N. Borneo)       | 4.8        | 134                                    | 1  | 54                                    | 55                                      |
| PAKISTAN                                       | 98,612,000           | 365,529          | 416,265  | .4         | 148,856                      | 1,479             | 304,561                  | .3         | 1,335                                  | 267                                      | 242                                   | 483                                     |
| PHILIPPINES                                    | 30,331,000           | 115,758          | 3,228,150  | 10.6       | 2,192,896                    | 8,267             | 17,397,000               | 57.0       | 34,734                                 | 40,778                                   | 508                                   | 419                                     |
| PORTUGUESE TIMOR                               | 528,000              | 7,330            | No figures available   |            |                              |                   |                          |            |  |  |                                       |   |
| TAIWAN (Free China)                            | 11,884,000           | 13,886           | 272,358  | 2.3        | 127,085                      | 1,362             | 163,814                  | 1.4        | 815                                    | 132                                      | 334                                   | 118                                     |
| THAILAND                                       | 28,835,000           | 200,148          | 33,598   | .12        | 23,152                       | 352               | 110,000                  | .4         | 251                                    | 7  | 314                                   | 278                                     |
| <b>Grand Totals</b>                            | <b>1,648,921,225</b> | <b>7,916,927</b> | <b>24,615,596</b>  | <b>1.5</b> | <b>7,882,991</b>             | <b>93,191</b>     | <b>28,102,432</b>        | <b>1.7</b> | <b>113,009</b>                         | <b>52,758</b>                            | <b>7,153</b>                          | <b>6,771</b>                            |

The statistics for the Christian churches in Asia have mainly been taken from the "World Christian Handbook" (Coxill and Grubb, eds.), published every five years (latest edition, 1962). The breakdown in the "Handbook" was retained, despite some problems. The statistics for Cambodia, Laos, and Viet Nam were combined, because the largest missionary agency in these countries submitted them that way and it was thought unwise to attempt a division. Population and area figures were taken from the "World Almanac 1965."

Statistics are notoriously unreliable. Therefore, great care should be exer-

cised in drawing conclusions from them. Statistics for individual countries from other sources than the "World Christian Handbook" will conflict with those in this chart, but it was thought best to use one source with a view toward consistency in the overall picture.

The following broad conclusions may be stated: (1) Christianity represents only a tiny minority of the population of Asia; (2) there is only one missionary for approximately every 118,000 people; (3) the missionary situation in Asia is in a highly critical state because of closed and closing doors.



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